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SUBJECT: GERMAN MFA DELEGATION VISITS TEHRAN, LEAVES TOUGH QUESTIONS AT HOME

REF: A. BERLIN 537 B. BERLIN 649

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Jeffrey Rathke for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)

¶1. (S//NF) SUMMARY: A senior-level MFA delegation visited Iran April 22-23. While the German delegation members pressed their Iranian hosts on both the nuclear issue and the Iranian regime's threats against Israel, they did not deliver criticism of Iran's role in Iraq and Afghanistan, nor did they even apparently raise Lebanon or Syria. They failed to challenge the Iranians on either the role of the IRGC or Iran's failure to return to the Baghdad trilateral security discussions. This is unfortunately consistent with what we have heard from the MFA in recent weeks regarding their position on other Middle East regional issues (ref B). The MFA plans to continue seeking Iran's perspective on regional issues; we believe increased information sharing with the German government on Iran's role in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon is a necessary first step in counteracting Iranian messaging. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) During a May 8 discussion, MFA Office Director for Middle Eastern Affairs Sabine Sparwasser detailed to PolOffs her April 22-23 trip to Iran as part of an MFA delegation. The delegation, headed by MFA Commissioner for Near East Affairs Andreas Michaelis (A/S-equivalent), met with senior and working-level Iranian MFA officials, as well as civil society and German business community representatives. Michaelis and Sparwasser were joined by current German Embassy Baghdad DCM Andreas Krueger, who will become the MFA's Senior Iran Desk Officer in autumn 2008.

¶3. (C) TRIP A 'RECIPROCAL' VISIT: Sparwasser characterized the delegation trip to Tehran as a "continued dialogue," reciprocating the April visit of Deputy Foreign Minister for European and American Affairs Mehdi Safari (reported reftel). Sparwasser said that meetings with senior MFA officials focused on the nuclear question and Iran's continuing threats against Israel, but indicated that no progress had been made on these issues.

¶4. (C) BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS INCLUDE PJAK: The fact that the claimed leader of the PKK-affiliated PJAK is a German citizen was a focal point of discussion on bilateral issues, said Sparwasser. The German officials informed their Iranian counterparts that the German Federal Prosecutor is examining the case; should sufficient evidence exist for pressing charges, the German justice system will handle the case. The German citizen's extradition to Iran, however, is out of the question, said Sparwasser.

¶5. (C) IRANIANS CLAIM INTEREST IS STABILITY IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: Sparwasser gave a positive assessment of discussions with working-level MFA counterparts on regional issues. She said that Iranian MFA interlocutors were "positive" on the Iraq neighborhood process and want to engage. She claimed her Iranian interlocutors "recognize

"their responsibility" on relations with Iraq and supporting its cohesion, emphasizing their interest in "calm developments" in Iraq. Her interlocutors told her "'foreign forces' must leave" but added that a discussion of the length of time such forces would remain in Iraq is important. On the situation in Basra and the role of Shi'ite militias, her interlocutors told her that Iran has influence but is "not that powerful" and asserted that Iran is reaching out to its contacts to convince them not to engage in violence. Her Iranian MFA counterparts told her that Iran is ready to continue trilateral security discussions with Iraq and the U.S. and even to raise the level of the discussions. She added that her Iranian interlocutors told her it is the U.S. that is unwilling to continue these discussions. PolOffs expressed incredulity, noting that the U.S. has repeatedly made clear its willingness to continue the trilateral discussions and that it is Iran that has so far refused to return to the table. Sparwasser did not endorse the Iranian point of view but told us she was simply passing on what she had heard.

¶6. (C) On Afghanistan, Sparwasser said her Iranian interlocutors expressed support for Karzai and desire to help. She noted that her interlocutors had repeated a statement made by DFM Safari (reftel) that all Taliban members are "bad" (implicitly rejecting efforts at reconciliation) and stressed their expertise about and long-standing opposition to the Taliban. Interlocutors also "totally reject" the possibility that the IRI is arming the Taliban, she said.

¶7. (C) EMPHASIS ON IRANIAN SUPPORT FOR STABILIZATION IN IRAQ

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AND AFGHANISTAN: Sparwasser said her Iranian MFA counterparts had underscored their own "efforts for stabilization" in the region, including extending a one billion dollar line of credit as well as energy assistance in Iraq. On Afghanistan, they touted their development of roads running from Herat, their acceptance of Afghan refugees, and asserted they had granted half a billion dollars in aid. Her interlocutors also emphasized Iran's efforts to secure the border with Afghanistan, alleging over 200 policemen had died in the line of duty, and their construction of border points on both the Iranian and Afghan sides. Her Iranian interlocutors also told her that Pakistan had failed to shore up security in the tri-border region and had "lost control totally" of their side. The Iranians asked the Germans for more help on border security and counternarcotics, particularly in police training and equipment; Germany is considering taking the lead on a proposed EU Commission regional project on drug control in and via Afghanistan that would be headquartered in Tehran, added Sparwasser. (NOTE: According to MFA contacts, Germany will be providing Iranian police canine detection unit training in May or June 2008 as part of a counternarcotics protocol signed by the German Interior Ministry with Iran in November 2007).

¶8. (C) IRANIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S.: Sparwasser also discussed U.S.-Iranian relations with her Iranian counterparts, who complained that the U.S. does not have a realistic image of Iran. In their view, this applies to both the Shah era (when the U.S. viewed the Shah government as stable and strong) and now (when the U.S. views the government as unstable and likely to fall), related Sparwasser. She added that her Iranian interlocutors raised repeatedly their frustration that "discreet discussions" held with the U.S. on Iraq issues "ended in media criticism" shortly afterward. She related that her Iranian interlocutors are "put off by that sequencing" and fear "being set up."

¶9. (C) BRIEF MENTION OF HAMAS, APPARENTLY NO DISCUSSION ON SYRIA/LEBANON: Sparwasser said that her interlocutors did not provide any new insights on their position on the Middle East Peace Process. She noted that the Iranians claimed to

have discreetly lobbied Hamas to participate in the Saudi-sponsored peace efforts last year. Sparwasser did not indicate that Iranian relations with Syria and Lebanon had been discussed.

¶10. (C) HIGH REGARD FOR IRANIAN MFA EXPERTISE, NO DISCUSSION OF IRGC ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICYMAKING: Throughout the debriefing to PolOffs, Sparwasser repeatedly praised the expertise and credibility of her interlocutors and noted that working-level exchanges with the Iranian MFA on regional issues would continue. She noted positively that some of her MFA counterparts were unwilling to defend their leaders' anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric, instead changing the subject when pressed by the Germans. Sparwasser did indirectly acknowledge that political forces might be at play within the Iranian MFA, expressing regret that former Iranian MFA Afghanistan Office Director Mohammed Ebrahim Taherian, whom she considered especially credible, had been moved to a "counselor" position; it was unclear to Sparwasser whether this had been a promotion or demotion. When asked by PolOffs if she had raised the role of the IRGC in Iranian foreign policymaking with any of her government or private interlocutors, Sparwasser conceded she had not.

¶11. (C) DISCUSSIONS WITH IRANIAN CIVIL SOCIETY, GERMAN INDUSTRY: Sparwasser also briefly detailed her discussions with Iranian civil society activists, as well as with representatives of German industry based in Tehran. Civil society activists told her that while they remain critical of the situation in Tehran, they are also certain of the regime's stability, adding that they were "not confident" that Ahmadinejad will lose the 2009 presidential elections. German industrial representatives expressed their unhappiness with the sanctions regime and the German government's unilateral pressure to decrease trade with Iran; these efforts are having a psychological effect on all German trade to Iran, they said. Sparwasser said the industry representatives claimed other countries, specifically France, are conducting business "on the sly."

¶12. (S//NF) COMMENT: While the German MFA's delegation did press its hosts on tough issues like Iran's nuclear program and its threats to Israel, its credulity in accepting standard IRIG talking points on Iran's activities in Iraq and Afghanistan is striking. We should consider bolstering information sharing (both with the MFA and via liaison channels) with Germany about Iran's negative role in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon in order to counteract Iranian

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messaging, particularly since the MFA intends to continue seeking out "dialogue" with the Iranian side on these key issues.

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